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Indiana College Personnel Association
November 9, 1972.

STUDENT DEVELOPMENT AND THE CHALLENGE OF STUDENT PERSONNEL, A PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

What are we about, anyway? I remember a time when there was no student personnel services organization or even effort. It was only what I, as dean, and a couple of faculty members, part time, tried to do to help students realize their goals.

Management of student personnel services is our disciplined effort to be of maximum help to our students in accomplishing their work and developing their greatest potential in character, personality, and contribution to society. Our prime objective is the development of people, not the doing of things and the programming of activities.

In this not-too-definitive context, we have to have clearly defined specific goals in any given educational institution or program. You may say, Well, it's education that this is all about. But, I ask, what education? If education is the development of people, then courses and classrooms and curricula are not enough. I cannot settle for the factual furnishing of the intellect. I am concerned with the growth of the whole person, including every facet of his personhood--or better, person-ness.

The relationship between general education and vocational orientation is not irrelevant. It is basic but insufficient for the liberal arts graduate to say, Here I am, a good person, generally educated. I have my A.B. Now what do I do? You'll probably hear the world say, Come on kid; I'll teach you the rest of the alphabet. So we should also be practical. But notice the direction of practicality.

The line moved from the curriculum, the course studied, through the student and what happens to him during the experience, to whatever the person does later on in the world of work and achievement.

This means I want a student personnel department as well as an academic program, with vital and meaningful connections and inter-relationships between them. It also means that I, as a person, want to be actively involved in both.

Furthermore, it means that, unless you settle for simply organizing out-of-class activities, how you relate to students for the purpose of helping them develop as persons will be largely influenced by your own commitments and values; by what you really believe, or don't really believe, about life and people and time and energy and eternity. "A man may not live the belief he professes, but he does live the belief he believes."

One of the great things about American education is that there is variety and flexibility provided by our dual system, the state and the private sectors. (May God always deliver us from a massive, monolithic federally-controlled system of education, unless we want another Hitler Germany.) Accordingly, institutions and programs vary according to their goals and objectives, respectively.

E.g., we declare ourselves as a Christian liberal arts college, and every word in that title has to be positively meaningful. The qualifications of the people who work in this program have to square with, or relate to, those meanings. And the part each plays in the program must relate similarly to those meanings.

To continue the example, what if we really believed the following:

"The important thing for a Christian is not where he is or what he has or what he does but who he is as a person. There is no place where it is more urgent to be than the place where he is, no work more significant than whatever is at hand, no person in greater need than the one immediately present, no issue more pressing than the one he now confronts."

If we really believed this, how would it affect how we communicate our values, what we emphasize, what we teach, and how we counsel our students.

The answer to this in no way depreciates or minimizes the students' need for the highest quality and most effective approach to knowledge, either in his introduction to the basics in all areas or in his mastery of a major option (discipline).

From my perspective on student personnel services (or, as we say here, student affairs), I look for those plus factors, those person-developing elements that we have defined as the special role of student affairs, in cooperation with all other components of the academic community, in the total program of the university and the total educational experience of the student.

Admittedly, this brief statement of one president's view raises more questions than it provides answers. But, you see, I can go now and leave you with the problems, but who, besides you, could solve them as well?

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